

Appendix B – Geographical and Historical Notes

Somerford Keynes is a small village, population 420 (2010), set on the edge of the Cotswolds and with the beginnings of the River Thames to its north west. Historically there is evidence of Bronze and Roman settlement nearby. One village boundary, to the south east has evidence of being over 3,000 years old. There is a Saxon Charter dating to 685 AD with the Church providing evidence of Saxon settlement with a Domesday Book entry. An active Historical group meets in the Village on a bi-monthly basis and holds a good record of artefacts as well as recording various aspects of the village's history. Further sources of Village history are detailed in Appendix E.

There have been few changes to the administration of the Parish since 2001. The Cotswold District Council remains as does Gloucestershire County Council. There is a move to change the electoral divisions so that they become a "single member division" and reduce the number of Councillors. The Gloucestershire County Council has already reduced its representation by 10 Councillors. There are also changes proposed to alter the Parish boundary to include Neigh Bridge Country Park and Lake 63 on the opposite side of the Oaksey Road into Somerford Keynes Parish. This is with the agreement of the adjoining Poole Keynes Parish. The owners of second homes in the Parish, primarily at Lower Mill, can vote at local elections as well as their primary place of residence.

One controversial issue that has emerged since 2001 is the demise of the Cotswold Water Park Society, replaced by a new Trust. The Society was set up in 1997 to administer the local authority assets in the Cotswold Water Park including Keynes Country Park. The park was sub-leased in 2008 by the Society to Watermark Leisure Ltd by means of a legal agreement which caused considerable disquiet. Complaints were sent to the District Auditor and the Local Authority Ombudsman who both agreed that the agreement raised issues of concern but felt unable to intervene. Watermark then attempted to close the park to all but paying entrants. An application was therefore submitted by the Parish Council to make all the paths at Keynes Country Park Public Rights of Way. As a result a meeting was held in the village hall in March 2010 to discuss matters, with Geoffrey Clifton Brown MP, in the chair. The prime reason stated for allowing the lease to go ahead was claimed to be because of the financial difficulties of the Society. (The Chief Executive of the Society was later jailed for 4½ years for fraudulently removing £700,000 from the Society funds.) The agreement unfortunately still stands. Watermark has since given notice for leaving the park in 2016. The controversy was one factor in the disbandment of the Cotswold Water Park Joint Committee, set up by the major local authorities in 1969 to co-ordinate policy in the gravel extraction area.

There have been very few new houses built in the Parish since 2001 except at Arlingdon Farm where seven new houses were built and a small bungalow demolished and rebuilt as a house. Development at Lower Mill takes up a considerable amount of time for the Parish Council, much of it controversial. There have been many applications for various changes of use and design and such things as Restaurants, Bistro, Shops, a Cheesery, Cooking School and community hall. One area where development has occurred is next to the Sewage Works where 40 pitches for traveller caravans appeared, without permission; however this site now has full approval and is known as Four Acres.

The Thames flood defences installed in 1998 work well and, in despite of the worst period of rainfall for 100 years, (which happened after the consultations) have kept the majority of the village dry. The recent problems have come from the eastern side with flooding from the County Ditch in Spratsgate Lane. Part of the problem has been a lack of maintenance of the ditches and rivers. Initially the Environment Agency refused to clear the Thames spillway protecting the south of the village because of water voles, not because of finance, finally common sense prevailed. Meetings continue to be held with the appropriate authorities.

Farming and gravel extraction are still major Parish businesses with leisure activities an obvious growth area. Hills at Shorncote are still extracting from within and outside their Shorncote site. There

is a possibility of extraction at the Cotswold Community site to the east. Waterland continue to expand its southern part of Keynes Country Park as do Head for Heights. Go by Cycle moved their operation from the Country Park into a village protection area and this field is designated Zone A in the CDC Supplementary Planning Guidance. There is also camping and caravanning on the site.

Gravel extraction continues to be an issue. Lake 91, opposite Keynes Park was completed however the decision to extract from inside the by-pass at the end of Mill Lane has been resolved. This site was part of the Lower Mill extraction site cut off by the by-pass in 1978. Thought too small to be economical, changing market conditions made it viable and Hanson decided against strong local opposition, to go ahead in 2003. As mitigation the extraction was done with the wellbeing of the local residents in mind and the subsequent Lake 99 modelled as a nature reserve. After much hard work, plans were agreed and grants obtained with the handover completed in May 2013. The fields to the north and west of Keynes Country Park and adjoining Shorncote were removed as areas of search from the Local Minerals Plan by a Government Inspector. However Moreton Cullimore Gravel purchased the land and, in 2010, applied for permission to extract. The matter has caused considerable local concern, not least of which from the residents of Shorncote, and is still ongoing and not resolved.

The Village Hall flourishes. A new entrance with a disabled toilet has been built and the hall refurbished, mainly with volunteer labour. It has a new kitchen, lighting, heating, video, a sound system with a hearing loop. Solar panels are installed on the roof to generate power and income. It was one of the first village halls in Gloucestershire to receive a Hallmark 3 designation. The hall is well used and forms the centre point for village social events including the very successful Golden Jubilee celebration in 2012 which was celebrated with a street party. The village at last won the Bledisloe Cup for the best kept village in 2004. The village is fortunate that it still has a pub, The Bakers Arms.

There is a well run village website to keep everyone up to date and a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme, that regretfully reported the loss of Saxon stone fragments from the Church, apparently stolen to order. Volunteering is essential for a well run village. Apart from the Parish Council and Parochial Church Council volunteers look after and maintain the village hall, maintain the churchyard, clean and provide flowers at the church, help set up the newspapers, run the Village Church Fete, Neighbourhood Watch, take part in the annual spring clean up, organise village social functions and, of course, write the new Parish Plan.



New entrance gate to Lake 99